

# Weekend Report: 'Princess and the Frog' Leaps to the Top

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## The Princess and the Frog

Though there were no sensational new releases, overall business remained at a steady clip over the weekend, up five percent over the same period last year. For 2009 as a whole, though, it's all gravy from here on

Naveen on balcony from The Princess and the Frog

out: in the middle of last week, it became the highest-grossing year in Hollywood history, and has topped \$9.7 billion (2002 remains the modern record for attendance).

In its nationwide debut, The Princess and the Frog conjured a solid \$24.2 million on approximately 4,800 screens at 3,434 sites. While less auspicious than the openings of Enchanted and the movies from Walt Disney Pictures' 1990s traditional animation heyday, it did mark the highest-grossing start ever for an animated movie in December, a month that's more a marathon for this type of picture than a sprint. Since traditionally-drawn animation has recently been out of favor amidst a computer-generated glut and the princess theme has been skewered in Enchanted, Shrek and other movies, Princess and the Frog was never going to have a huge opening, instead relying on a slower audience build-up. According to distributor Walt Disney Pictures' research, 64 percent of the audience was female, 53 percent was 25 years

old and younger, and 81 percent were parents and their children.

Invictus was licked in its first round, mustering \$8.6 million on around 2,700 screens at 2,125 sites. While the debut could be spun as the biggest opening ever for a rugby-themed picture, it seemed a bit lightweight considering its high profile release and the heavyweight involvement of director Clint Eastwood and stars Morgan Freeman and Matt Damon. Despite those big names, Invictus could not have reasonably been expected to do huge business, because its subject matter, from South African history to the sport of rugby, is not inviting or relatable in the way that pictures like *The Blind Side* and other sports and/or true story movies are. The advertising didn't bring it home as to why Invictus' story is important, assuming that the mention of Nelson Mandela and South Africa was sufficient to get audiences' inspirational juices flowing.

*The Blind Side* juggernaut pressed on, giving up 25 percent for a \$15.1 million gross in its fourth weekend. In the process, the football-themed drama hit \$149.8 million in just 24 days, a remarkable feat for a sports movie and for a picture that's not a special effects extravaganza or sequel.

*The Twilight Saga: New Moon* leveled off somewhat but still tumbled 48 percent to \$8 million, accumulating a massive \$267.3 million in 24 days. The first *Twilight* also grossed around \$8 million on the same weekend last year (albeit with a \$150 million tally), and *New Moon*'s percentage drop was about the same as *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* at the same point.

Down 12 percent, *A Christmas Carol* (2009) saw the smallest dip among nationwide releases, generating \$6.8 million and lifting its total to \$124.4 million in 38 days. The hold was by virtue of the fact that it's the market's prominent Christmas-themed family movie. *The Polar Express*, for instance, fell 11 percent on the same weekend in 2004.

In limited release, *Up in the Air* expanded well from 15 sites last weekend to 72 this weekend, grossing \$2.4 million, and it's scheduled to go nationwide on Christmas day. *The Lovely Bones*, which is not set for nationwide release

until Jan. 15, debuted to a relatively unspectacular \$116,616 at three sites.

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